

## Record Number of Americans Are Buckling Up

September 16, 2004. Seattle, WA –

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta announced during a visit to Seattle that a record 80 percent of Americans wear their safety belts while driving or riding in their vehicles.

In the past four years, safety belt use has increased steadily from 71 percent in 2000 to 80 percent this year. The 80 percent safety belt usage will save 15,200 lives and \$50 billion in economic costs associated with traffic related crashes, injuries, and deaths every year, Mineta said.

The Secretary said the success was due in large part to states that have passed primary safety belt laws. Twenty-one states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have primary safety belt laws that allow police officers to stop a motorist solely for not wearing a safety belt.

The Secretary chose to visit Washington for the announcement to tout its success, noting 94 percent of the state's citizens buckle up. Washington passed a primary seatbelt law in 2002 and experienced a 9 percent reduction in overall traffic fatalities since the law was passed, he said.

"It's no coincidence that because 8 out of 10 Americans are wearing their safety belts, we have also achieved the lowest traffic fatality rate on our Nation's highways since record-keeping began 29 years ago," Mineta said.

Today's traffic fatality rate is 1.48 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, a dramatic reduction since 1975 when the rate was 3.35 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. ■

## Mid-Atlantic Region Continues Crackdown on Impaired Driving

In addition to the nationwide *You Drink & Drive. You Lose* Crackdown August 27 – September 12, agencies from across the Mid-Atlantic region joined in further supporting the Regional *Checkpoint Strikeforce* sobriety checkpoint and public awareness campaign. Throughout the remainder of 2004, the campaign is employing resonant ads in a robust paid media effort to remind citizens of the many dangers and consequences of impaired driving. "*Checkpoint Strikeforce*'s creative radio ads, which will run until the end of the year, are designed specifically to hit home with the target audience of 21-to-35-year-old males - a hard-to-reach audience that is statistically most at risk for impaired driving. To listen to the ads log on to [www.wrap.org](http://www.wrap.org).

Elizabeth Baker, Regional Administrator for NHTSA's Mid-Atlantic Region was the keynote speaker at the kick-off event. "The strength of *Checkpoint Strikeforce* is that it unifies all the key elements proven to reduce impaired driving," said Beth. "Jurisdictional borders are essentially made moot by the deployment of sobriety checkpoints across the region. The bottom-line message of *Checkpoint Strikeforce* is as simple as it is serious: If you drink and drive, you WILL get caught." ■



Mid Atlantic Regional Administrator Elizabeth Baker at the kickoff of Checkpoint Strikeforce.

# A Mother's Heartbreak in Ohio – And the Administrator's Promise

*(The following is the text of a letter written to NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeff Runge, along with his handwritten reply.)*

August 12, 2004

Dear Dr. Runge:

I don't know quite how to start, but I promise to try to keep it brief for I know you are a very busy man. I am writing to you today from my home in Strongsville, Ohio, about 12 miles south of Cleveland, county of Cuyahoga. I share my city with a population of about 40,000. I always go out of my way to personally thank people who I have met or have observed that have dedicated their life and careers to the health and safety issues of others, especially our children.

I was able to catch your presentation on C-SPAN this a.m. and I just felt the desire to write. Today's date, August 12, is my son Richie's 22nd. Birthday. Although the last three he has celebrated in heaven. He was 17 years old on August 27, 1999 when he was killed, riding as a passenger in a car that crashed. Three out of the four teenage boys in the car died that night. Our community suffered an unspeakable loss.

I miss him dearly and to live without him has been unbearable. Even for the love of my two daughters and husband, I still wanted to be with Richie. I realized early on, that if something positive did not come from my child's death, I could just as soon lie down and die next to him.

A few months after Richie's death I was contacted by Cuyahoga County's Child Death Review Committee and asked if I would participate. It was about this same time that I came to the conclusion I could not take the remarks anymore, like- "all teenagers drive recklessly," or "all teenage boy's will speed and race their cars". I refused to believe my son's death was "his destiny, his fate or even an act of God." No! I would no longer believe that, for if I did or any of us did, we would never do anything to prevent it from happening again.

I am not naive; I do realize there are many, many issues out there, and that not all deaths can be prevented. But, what happened the night my son was killed was predictable, controllable, and very preventable. I was so truly touched and inspired by the people I met through the county who just like yourself dedicate themselves to others health and safety, I knew I had to find a way to help others. I never wanted another family to live through this pain and grief.

I did my research, made many new, very well educated friends, and it just all fit together from there. I was invited by our city's D.A.R.E. police officers to join in their discussion on peer pressure and safe choices. For the last three years I have been traveling locally, to eighth grade health classes where I share my son's story. The discussion is part scare tactics, and part compassion.

The students are 100 percent respectful, cooperative and very willing to listen. I share many personal belongings of Richie, so as to let them know what a great kid he was. We discuss the choices Richie made that night, in addition they learn about every last minute of Richie's last day, including accounts of the crash scene and the coroners report. The program has been so well received, with many wonderful reviews by the school and community. It is no easy job for me, I am able to keep it together the day of the presentation but I bottom out the next day, privately.

Everything you talked about in your report is everything that is of so much interest to me. I wish there was a way to successfully reach the teens and their parents as to making safe choices. I understood you totally when you spoke of the success of seat belt education and drunk driving, now we must continue to combat excessive speed. The year my son was killed the study revealed 8 out of the 8 teens killed were not using alcohol, or drugs, and that 7 out of the 8 teens killed did have their seat belts on, but the concluding factor was the speed of the vehicles.

I have worked side by side with my police department; urging them to write the speeding tickets, don't just give warnings. I have worked in cooperation with our State Department of Transportation, regarding better ways to help educate the new drivers and their parents. Anyway, it has been a long rough journey, one with little regrets. I have greatly appreciated all the acts of kindness and cooperation from elected officials and all of the dedicated employees I have met along the way. I just wanted to say THANK YOU to you and all of your staff members for all of your hard work and dedication. You are greatly appreciated by this mother.

I am proud to be a citizen of Ohio, which according to your reports have shown a decrease in the amount of traffic deaths. This is all good news. I can only hope and pray that the numbers continue to decrease, forever.

Mrs. Laurie Survoy  
Strongsville, Ohio

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Dear Mrs. Survoy:

Thank you for your letter. It was an incredible lift to those of us who live and breathe to prevent other moms from experiencing what you have endured. I hope you will allow me to publish your letter in our employer newsletter.

NHTSA is a relatively small agency in government. We have about 550 people in Washington and about 100 more among 10 regional offices in the U.S. Each and every one of them is deeply committed to making sure that we do everything humanly possible to bring moms, dads, and kids home safely each night. And when we do that—when crashes and injuries are prevented – no one thinks about saying “thank you.” The irony that we were unable to help bring Richie home to you that awful night, and yet you are the one who takes the time to say “thank you” is quite humbling.

I will make you this promise: We will never rest until every American has the opportunity for safe passage on our roads and highways – safe from drunk drivers, safety buckled up, and driving vehicles that are as safe as can be, at safe speeds. I jump out of bed every morning thinking about how much there is to do, and how urgent this task is.

Our nation's progress in highway traffic safety does not happen only as a result of what we do in Washington. It will happen as a result of people like you, at the local level, *insisting* that police enforce impaired driving laws and that the courts deal with offenders appropriately, that legislatures allow safety enforcement with primary belt laws (Ohio does not have one), and that people choose vehicles that have the highest government safety ratings—and, yes, that the community supports enforcement of speed laws.

Mrs. Survoy, I pray that you will find peace in your sorrow that Richie's legacy will be that *you* save some other or many other kids in Cuyahoga County through your actions. And that someone takes the time to say “thank you” to you.

Jeff Runge

## Quote of the Month

*No one is so rich  
that he does not need  
another's help; no  
one is so poor as not  
to be useful in some  
way to his fellow man;  
and the disposition to  
ask assistance from  
others with confidence,  
and to grant it with  
kindness, is part of our  
very nature.*

– Pope Leo XII

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# NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeffrey Runge and FHWA Administrator Mary Peters Take Part in DOT Ride to Work Day Festivities

*By Faithia Robertson, Office Of Communications and Consumer Information*

**July 21, 2004. Nassif Building Plaza.** More than 60 DOT employees revved up to participate in this year's *Ride to Work* Day activities to demonstrate that motorcycling can be a practical form of transportation.

On this day, DOT riders parked their bikes on the Nassif Building Plaza where many employees stopped by to

marvel at the wide variety of bikes, the custom chrome work and the unique styles.

NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeffrey Runge and FHWA Administrator Mary Peters also attended the event.

"Done safely, riding can be a socially responsible form of personal

mobility that saves energy, helps the environment and helps reduce congestion on our highways," said Dr. Runge, as he strolled through the wide array of bikes.

Administrator Peters who was a participating rider explained that, "riding to work on this day shows the positive value of motorcycle transportation."

At the event, there was a midday safety fair where NHTSA employees Bob Hohn and Robert Young, who serve as area motorcycle safety instructors, demonstrated a variety of the "Basic Rider Course" motorcycle maneuvers.

NHTSA staff, Faithia Robertson and Marietta Bowen joined representatives from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) and the Maryland Rider Education Program to answer safety related questions and to distribute materials on training programs in the area. ■



*FHWA Administrator Mary Peters invites NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeff Runge along for the ride.*

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## New York Symposium Focuses on Commercial Drivers

NHTSA's Headquarters and Eastern Region professionals joined other Federal DOT and State partners in participating in the New York Commercial Vehicle Driver Symposium, held July 14-15, 2004, in Albany, N.Y. More than 200 participants heard presentations from a panel that featured Regional Administrator Tom Louizou, who addressed NHTSA's priorities; Dr. Paul Rau, from NHTSA's Research and Development office, who talked about the Commercial Driver Drowsy Driving Vehicle Technology; and Sami Richie. ■



*Dr. Paul Rau (left), Sami Richie (center) and New York Governor's Representative for Highway Safety Ray Martinez (right).*